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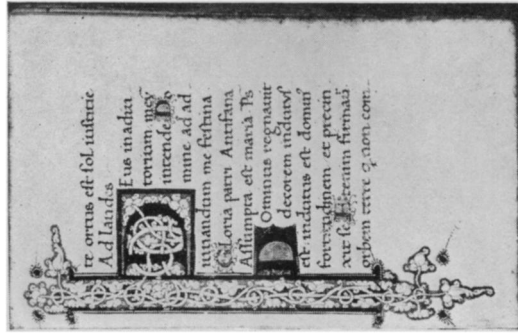
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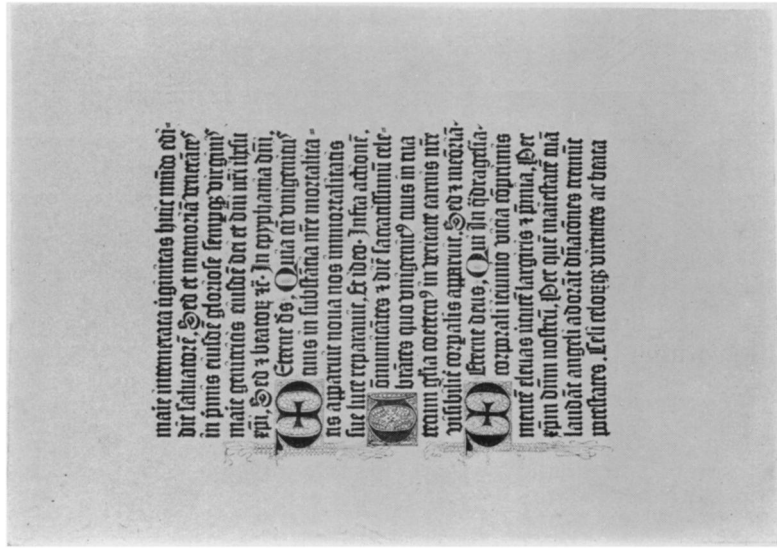
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Above: Page written and decorated in the "school" founded by Ferdinand I of Naples 1460-1480.

Right: Facsimile of page of Mainz Psalter, 1457. First book with initial letters printed in color.



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SMIBERT'S PORTRAIT OF MRS. THOMAS BULFINCH

The latest acquisition to the collection of Early American portraits is a painting by John Smibert of Mrs. Thomas Bulfinch. It is the only example of this artist's work in the Museum and ranks among his best.

Smibert was born in Edinburgh, April, 1688, the son of John Smibert, a "litster" or dyer of that town and his wife, Alison Bell. Nothing is known of his childhood but early in life he formed an intimate friendship with Allan Ramsay, the Scottish poet, two years his elder, and later painted his portrait, which was engraved as a frontispiece to Ramsay's published works. For the slight knowledge which we have of the beginnings of Smibert's career we must depend upon Walpole's "Anecdotes of Painting in England" and the notes of George Vertue. Here we find that he was first apprenticed in Edinburgh to a house painter and plasterer with whom he served for seven years, during which time a strong inclination to learn to draw with no opportunity for study decided him to go to London. There he received employment in painting and decorating coaches and then passed three or four years in copying paintings for dealers. He then returned to his native town where he first attempted painting from life. He soon went back to London, however, and about 1717 set out for Italy, studying and copying the works of Titian, Raphael, Rubens and Van Dyck. While there he executed a commission from the Grand Duke of Tuscany to paint the portraits of some Siberian Tartars to be sent as a present to Peter the Great, Czar of Russia, and it was during his Italian sojourn that he made the copy of Van Dyck's portrait of Cardinal Bentivoglio. This portrait was presented in 1791 by John Trumbull to Harvard College, and eighty years after it was painted helped to initiate Washington Allston into the mysteries and art of color.

Smibert returned to London in or about 1720 and under the patronage of the Earl of Bristol established himself there as a portrait painter: "meeting," says Walpole, "with much success." Certain authorities state that before going to Italy he

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entered the drawing school of Sir James Thornhill in London, but as this school was not started until 1724 it is evident that if he received any instruction there, he allowed four years to pass after his return from Italy before becoming a student of it. He did, however, while in London, become a member of a club of Vertuosi or group of "Rosacorosians," which included among its membership Bernard Lens, John Wootton, Thomas Gibson and George Vertue, and he painted a large "painting-piece," now lost sight of, of the club members. While in Italy he became acquainted with George Berkeley (1684-1763), then a tutor in Trinity College, Dublin, who later became successively Dean of Derry and Bishop of Cloyne. This acquaintance was renewed upon their return to London, and about this time Berkeley conceived what Walpole terms "the uncertain but amusing scheme" of founding a universal college of science and art in Bermuda for the instruction of heathen children, and, contrary to the advice of his friends, Smibert accepted Berkeley's offer of the position of professor of the fine arts in this college. After four years of preparation they sailed late in 1728 for America, Berkeley relinquishing a profitable living as a dean and Smibert his well-established profession. They reached Newport, Rhode Island, 23 of January, 1729, but it is probable that Smibert soon realized the quixotic nature of the enterprise, for Berkeley wrote in March, 1729, that Smibert had for some time been living in Boston. Here he apparently at once resumed his painting, living in rooms on Green Lane which he rented of James Gooch, but other interests shortly divided his attention, for on the 30th of July, 1730, he was married to Mary Williams, the twenty-three year old daughter of Dr. Nathaniel Williams, a well-known physician and school master of Boston, by whom he had seven sons and two daughters. Of these nine children only three survived their father and the youngest child, Nathaniel (1735-1756) followed in his father's profession; the two or three portraits in existence which he painted show that a career of great promise was cut short by his early death.

The following advertisement in the Boston News Letter of the 17th of October, 1734, witnesses that Smibert resorted to other sources of income besides painting: "John Smibert, Painter, Sells all Sorts of Colours, Dry or Ground, with Oils

and Brushes, Frames of several Sorts, the best Mezzotints, Italian, French, Dutch and English Paints in Frames and Glasses, or without, by Wholesale or Retail, at Reasonable Rates, at his House in Queen Street between the Town-House and the Orange-Tree, Boston." His new studio located on the spot where now Brattle Street enters Court Street, was the one which he kept for the remainder of his life, and much later it was used by Trumbull, who found many of Smibert's paintings in it, and by Allston and John Johnston. About 1740 he took his nephew, John Moffatt, as a partner in his color and print shop and after Smibert's death, Moffatt and Mrs. Smibert continued to keep it. Smibert's name occurs occasionally upon the Boston Town Records. In 1734 he was appointed one of a committee to report upon the repairing of Long Wharf and the building of a battery upon it and in the same year he was excused from the duties of constable "for reasons by him given." In 1735 his name appears as contributing £15 towards the building of the workhouse and in 1747 he was a member of a committee "to consider what will be most for the advantage of the Town to do with the dirt in the streets." In 1740 he planned and designed the new market house given to the town by Peter Faneuil and since famous as Faneuil Hall, and although this is the only recorded instance of Smibert's architectural activities it is not improbable that other buildings were built from his designs.

About 1748 failing health and eyesight slackened his labors and on April 2, 1751, he died at the age of sixty-three. He was buried in the tomb of his father-in-law in the Granary Burying Ground, the third to the right of the gate and now marked by a stone bearing the inscription "Thomas & John Bradlee's Tomb 1816."

Soon after his death a friend wrote a lengthy epitaph in Latin which was intended to be placed on a marble slab and an order was sent by Moffatt to Smibert's friend, Peter Scheemakers (1691-1770), the sculptor, in London to design a fitting memorial for the tomb, but for some reason the stone was never erected.

During his life in Boston Smibert painted many portraits of men and women prominent in New England's social life—judges, divines, merchants, men of leisure and their wives and

daughters. His best-known work is his large family group picture or "conversation-piece" representing his friend Berkeley surrounded by members of his family, with his own figure introduced in the background. With one exception this is probably the earliest group picture painted in this country. His work was of uneven quality and it is somewhat difficult to limit the period of his best production. Broadly speaking, however, it may be said to ante-date 1740. To this period belong the several portraits of Berkeley, the two Pemberton children, Daniel Oliver and his wife, John Turner, John Gerrish, Hon. Benjamin Lynde, the Reverend James McSparran, Judge Edmund Quincy, the Reverend John Hancock and his wife, Governor Wanton, the three Oliver brothers, John Nelson, and that of Mrs. Bulfinch which the Museum has just bought. In his methods of painting he followed closely those in vogue in the first quarter of the eighteenth century in England and at its best his work compares favorably with that of Michael Dahl, Charles Jervas and Joseph Highmore. It has, however, sufficient individuality to prevent its being confused with the work of others. His most glaring faults are discovered when he painted his subjects at full length, for he habitually made the head too small, the arms too long and the distance from the waist to the feet too short. In his portraits of women of bust or half length size he occasionally exaggerated the relation between the size of the head and the torso. During his active life here he had no serious rival in his profession, if we except Robert Feke who at his best surpassed him as an artist.

His death notice in the Boston Gazette of the 9th of April, 1751, gives the following contemporary judgment of his worth as a man and an artist: "Well-known for many fine Pictures he has done here, and celebrated in Italy, as well as Britain, for a good Painter by the best Judges. As a Member of Society, he was a valuable Gentleman, of a happy Temper, great Humanity and Friendship, a kind Husband, Tender Father, and steady Friend."

Mrs. Thomas Bulfinch, the subject of the portrait, was Judith Colman, daughter of John and Judith (Hobby) Colman of Boston, where she was born 1 May, 1707. Her father and mother were both members of families of wealth and social prominence. Her uncle, Reverend Benjamin Colman, was the

first minister of the Church in Brattle Square, of which her father was one of the founders and because of this he aroused the venomous tongue of Cotton Mather, who describes him in his diary as "a very abusive Creature, in whom the three parts of the Satanic Image, Pride, Malice and Falsehood are very Conspicuous, must be pitied and pray'd for." His mansion stood on the site of the American House, Hanover Street, and he had large warehouses near the wharves. He and his wife and his brother and his wife were also painted by Smibert. Judith Colman's sister Mary married Peter Chardon, one of Boston's richest merchants and she herself in June 1724, just after reaching her seventeenth birthday, became the wife of Dr. Thomas Bulfinch (1694-1757), a leading Boston physician who had been educated in Paris. Their married life was passed in a large mansion on Bowdoin Square, built on land given to Mrs. Bulfinch by her father upon her marriage. A son and a daughter were the only issue of the marriage. The daughter married Reverend Samuel Cooper, minister of the Brattle Square Church and the son marrying Susan Apthorp, a daughter of Charles Apthorp whose portrait by Feke was purchased by the Museum in 1918, became the father of the distinguished American architect, Charles Bulfinch (1763-1844). Mrs Bulfinch survived her husband a little over six years and died 20 July, 1765, at the age of fifty-eight.

Her portrait, which measures twenty-nine by twenty-four and one-quarter inches and in its original frame, was painted probably about 1733 and has remained in the possession of the family until its recent purchase by the Museum. During its later years it has been owned in Florence, Italy, by Mrs. Francis Alexander, the widow of the American portrait painter, and their daughter. It shows Mrs. Bulfinch to the waist, her oval face surrounded by light brown hair which falls in a curl upon each shoulder. The head rests firmly on a sturdy neck of Grecian proportions and her large brown, widely separated, eyes gaze at the spectator. She wears a loose-fitting robe of blue which exposes a well-developed bosom, relieved by the white muslin ruffle of the chemisette. The background is a drab brown and the picture is framed by a painted or feigned oval.

L. P.